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ABSTRACT

Issues facing educators today include drug traffic and abuse, crime and delinquency, gangs, weapons, violence, vandalism, schoolyard bullying, and crisis management. Teachers and administrators require special skills to cope with potentially explosive situations and violent students, yet training in those skills is not being received in university teacher preparation programs. This paper reports on the "School Safety Leadership Curriculum," a model for the development of a school violence prevention curriculum to be used at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology, Pepperdine University (California). The model focuses on knowledge and skills needed to foster and maintain a safe, secure, and welcoming school climate. Designed to be presented in an applied, hands-on, interactive mode, the model contains lesson plans with lecture notes, bibliographies, and supporting instructional materials. The model curriculum is organized into the following instructional modules: (1) peer aggression and self esteem; (2) gangs and youth violence; (3) preparing for the unexpected; (4) balancing student rights and responsibilities; and (5) making every campus safe. After the completion of field testing at Pepperdine and in selected public schools, the curriculum will be available to colleges and universities through the National School Safety Center at Pepperdine University. (LL)

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From Fistfights to Gunfights: Preparing Teachers and Administrators to Cope with Violence in School

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From Fistfights to Gunfights: Preparing Teachers and Administrators to Cope with Violence in School

Much is heard today about the need for excellence in America's schools. If educational excellence is ever to be achieved, however, schools must be safe and hospitable places for teachers and students. Teachers cannot teach and students cannot learn in an environment filled with violence and fear.

School authorities are expected to maintain a safe school environment. In fact, they are mandated by law to do so. In 1984, for example, the voters of California overwhelmingly passed the California Right to Safe Schools Constitutional Amendment, Article I, Section 18(c) which guarantees that:

> All students and staff of primary, elementary, junior high and senior high schools have the inalienable right to attend campuses which are safe, secure and peaceful.

Yet, in an increasing number of our nation's schools students and teachers are required to endure violence, fear, and intimidation on a daily basis.

In 1985, Justice Lewis Powell, in a case reviewed by the U. S. Supreme Court (New Jersey v. T.L.O.), commented on the growing problem of violence in schools. He wrote:

> Without first establishing discipline and maintaining order, teachers cannot begin to educate their students. And apart from education, the school has the obligation to protect pupils from mistreatment by other children, and also to protect teachers themselves from violence by the few students whose conduct in recent years has promoted national concern. (United States Supreme Court, New Jersey v. T.L.O., 1985)

Growing School Violence

Violence within the elementary and secondary schools of America has increased dramatically since Justice Powell wrote the above comment and continues to escalate at an alarming rate.

A bill introduced into the House of Representatives of the U. S. Congress (H.R. 4538, "Classroom Safety Act of 1992") summarized the rising tide of violence in America's schools thusly:

- Over 3,000,000 crimes occur on or near school campuses every year,

16,000 per school day, or one every 6 seconds;

- One fourth of the major school districts now use metal detectors in an attempt to reduce the number of weapons introduced into the schools by students;
- Twenty percent of teachers in schools have reported being threatened with violence by a student;
- The despair brought on by poverty and disenfranchisement that affects millions of our youth is rapidly entering the schools; and
- Schools are being asked to take on responsibilities that society as a whole has neglected forcing teachers to referee fights rather than teach.

The National Association of School Security Directors estimates that each year there are 12,000 armed robberies, 270,000 burglaries, 204,000 aggravated assaults, 9,000 rapes, and 70,000 serious assualts on teachers by students in America's schools. The U.S. Senate Committee on Delinquency has estimated that vandalism costs our nation's schools over $600 million per year. (Johnson, et. al., 1994)

Most people equate school violence with large urban areas such as New York, Chicago or Los Angeles. While there has been ample reporting of the violence plaguing big city schools, violence has invaded suburban and rural schools with little notice by the national media. A 1990 Texas A & M University study found that many rural schools have worse violence problems than the national average. (Kingery, 1990)

On May 1, 1992 a school dropout entered the local high school in the small town of Olivehurst in northern California and terrorized students and staff for more than eight hours. Before the ordeal was over, three students and a teacher

had been killed and nine others wounded. Later that same month, a middle school student brought a gun to school in rural Napa, California. After shooting and wounding two classmates, he explained to authorities that he was just retaliating for being bullied by other students at school.

Issues facing educators today include, but are not necessarily limited to, drug traffic and abuse, crime and delinquency, gangs, weapons, violence, vandalism, schoolyard bullying, and crisis management. Teachers and administrators require special skills to cope with potentially explosive situations and violent students. Yet, teachers and administrators are not receiving training in those skills in their university preparation programs.

In a recent study conducted by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing School Violence Advisory Panel, only four percent of 362 college and university teacher and administrator preparation program coordinators throughout the U.S. indicated that students leave their training programs prepared to address violence effectively in their schools. The same study found that nearly 90 percent of recently credentialed teachers, administrators and support personnel surveyed indicated a need for such training. (Dear, et. al., 1994)

School Safety Legislation

The California Legislature, believing that "certificated school personnel often are not prepared effectively in their professional programs to cope with potentially violent situations or with violent youth," amended the California Education Code (California Senate Bill 2460, Green, 1990). The revised code requires the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), the state agency that regulates teacher preparation and licensing, to undertake leadership activities directed toward establishing appropriate standards of preparation for

teachers and other certificated personnel concerning violent behavior by students.

More recently, the California Legislature passed legislation to further amend the California Education Code (California Assembly Bill 2264, Andal, 1993) which will require instruction on school safety as a prerequisite for obtaining preliminary teaching and school administrator credentials. As of January 1, 1996, all California colleges and universities with teacher and administrator preparation programs will be required to modify their curricula to provide instruction on the principles of school safety. As a minimum the instruction must include:

- Developing and maintaining a positive and safe school climate;
- Developing classroom management skills which emphasize intervention and conflict resolution;
- Gang identification techniques;
- Defusing potentially explosive confrontations between pupils or between pupils and school employees; and
- Effective handling of pupils who possess weapons on school grounds.

Commenting on the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing School Violence Advisory Panel study mentioned above, Ronald Stephens, Executive Director of the National School Safety Center observed that:

> When asked to share ideas about how to reduce violence, participants frequently mentioned actions that others needed to take. For example, pupil personnel support staff discussed what teachers and administrators should do. Administrators offered ideas for parents and teachers. Teachers tended to offer suggestions about how administrators can be more supportive, how students' values and morals need to improve, and how parents need to provide better role models. It is easier for most individuals to identify what others should do rather than making a candid self-appraisal of what "I" can do.
>
> Given this pattern, training programs should be designed to increase the awareness of all credential candidates about their personal role in violence reduction and prevention. Otherwise, educators may continue to define the problem as one caused by others and relegate the responsibility for solving it to others, too. (Stephens, 1994)

Model School Safety Curriculum

After pascage of the Green bill (1990), Pepperdine University began planning for the development of a school violence prevention curriculum to be used in the training of future teachers and administrators at the Graduate School of Education and Psychology. An initial seminar on school safety was prepared and presented to a select group of teachers in an administrator preparation program in early 1992. The seminar was conducted by personnel of the National School Safety Center, a resource center administered by Pepperdine University and funded by the U. S. Departments of Education and Justice.

In June of 1992, funding was obtained through a grant from the Pacific Telesis Foundation to finance the development of model curriculum materials on creating a safe school environment to be used in the teacher and administrator preparation programs at Pepperdine University.

A model curriculum was developed, entitled "School Safety Leadership Curriculum," which focused on the knowledge and skills that teachers and administrators need to foster and maintain a safe, secure and welcoming school climate. Designed to be presented in an applied, hands-on, interactive mode, the 200-page model curriculum contains detailed lesson plans with lecture notes, extensive bibliographies, and supporting instructional materials such as overhead transparency masters. The model curriculum is organized into five instructional modules. They are:

- Peer Aggression and Self-Esteem;
- Gangs and Youth Violence;
- Preparing for the Unexpected;
- Balancing Student Rights and Responsibilities; and
- Making Every Campus Safe.

The first instructional module, **Peer Aggression and Self-Esteem**, focuses on the relationship of self-esteem and aggressive youth behavior. Aggression in the form of intimidation, bullying or harassment is experienced by many young people today. When young people fail to find acceptance, affirmation, and a sense of belonging many seek satisfaction of those needs in ways that are both personally and socially destructive.

This module addresses the causes of aggression, characteristics of both bullies and victims, and strategies for building self-esteem and self-confidence in school children. Also included are strategies for breaking up fights, skills for dealing with weapon-wielding students, and suggestions of what to do when a serious habitual offender enrolls in your school.

The second instructional module, **Gangs and Youth Violence**, discusses one of the most gripping problems facing communities across the country today -- the burgeoning growth of youth gangs. The impact of gangs on the incidence and level of violence in the school cannot be overstated. Gangs are engaging in many forms of criminal activity such as marketing drugs, assault and intimidation in the schools and in the surrounding communities.

Schools that have not yet experienced full-fledged gangs often have informal social groups that become prime recruiting targets for organized criminal gangs. This module focuses on gang recognition and identification and suggests model prevention, intervention, and suppression strategies.

The third module, **Preparing for the Unexpected**, deals with crisis prevention, preparedness, management, and resolution. Lessons learned by school leaders who have faced major crises are presented and discussed. Role playing scenarios demonstrate unique perspectives and strategies. Special attention is given to dealing with the media when a crisis occurs.

Nearly every aspect of school safety is inseparably tied to the law. Constitutional provisions, legislative enactments and court decisions must guide school leaders in developing classroom management and student supervision policies. The law identifies what must be done and defines the parameters of what teachers and administrators may do to make the campus safe. The fourth module, **Balancing Student Rights and Responsibilities**, addresses the tough legal issues school leaders face in dealing with student offenders. Particular emphasis is placed on reasonable behavior expectations in terms of student conduct, appearance and disruption. The module also emphasizes rights and responsibilities of students, teachers' confidentiality and record sharing, and third party liability.

The final module, **Making Every Campus Safe**, identifies key elements of "safe school planning" by outlining the process by which a safe school plan can be created, who should be involved and how to make it happen. Special emphasis is placed upon how to assess the conditions and issues that exist at the school. The assessment provides the basis for the development of a comprehensive, collaborative, systematic safe school plan.

Conclusion

These are perhaps the most challenging times ever to be an educator. The issue of personal safety for students and teachers alike looms large as a compelling concern among school leaders, teachers, students, and their parents. The changing climate for public education has mandated new skills for teachers and administrators, skills that will prepare them to handle the challenge of increasing violence in schools. The **School Safety Leadership Curriculum** represents one effort to provide educators with those requisite skills.

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NOTE: Although intended as a guide and resource for university teacher and administrator preparation programs, the model curriculum would be appropriate for in-service training of currently practicing teachers and administrators. The model curriculum is currently being field tested at Pepperdine University and in selected public schools. After field testing has been completed and needed modifications made the model curriculum will be available to colleges and universities through the National School Safety Center at Pepperdine University.